COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

'Squish' new way to compress files

If you're running out of hard disk space, it may be time to "Squish" your files.

Squish, available from Sundog Software Corp. of Brooklyn, N.Y., is a revolutionary new file compressor program that does away with time-consuming uncompressing of files. It costs only $79 but could save hundreds of dollars in hard disk costs.

Squish lets you use your data files in compressed form, instead of having to uncompress data, make additions or changes, and then recompress. This is a major technological achievement in terms of saved time and space.

Segal

Almost all data files stored on your hard disk contain unused space. In a data base of names and addresses, a 20-character "country" field may be set up below the address, but only a very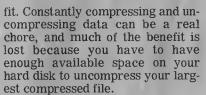 small number of records might actually have a country name in the field. Nonetheless, many programs automatically insert "fill" characters to hold that space, just in case. Thus, your computer's limited hard-disk storage often gets filled with a lot of blank space.

Ingenious mathematical algorithms have been invented that can compress blank space to a mere fraction of its former size. Also, files of solid text — even without a lot of blank space — can be compressed as much as 30 percent.

Until now, the primary use for these file-compression programs has been for archival storage — for backups, so that less backup media such as floppies or tape is required. For day-to-day usage, however, existing programs have simply been too time-consuming to be of real bene-fit. Constantly compressing and uncompressing data can be a real chore, and much of the benefit is lost because you have to have enough available space on your hard disk to uncompress your largest compressed file.

Squish has changed that. It lets you use files in the compressed mode, and even make changes. Indeed, it treats the compressed files as if they were normal files, and doesn't bother to uncompress and recompress the files as you work with them. The files are simply stored and used with the Squish algorithm.

That means that you can store vast quantities of information in much less space. In addition to saving space, Squish can also save you money. Because files are smaller, they can be backed up or transmitted more quickly. Quicker transmission means lower costs.

Of course, Squish is not for everyone. Before buying the pro-gram, the follow drawbacks should be considered:

✔ It's not a simple program to set up.

✔ It might conflict with other memory-resident programs.

✔ Squish does not support all programs. Although it does work with an impressive list of software, you would be wise to test any questionable programs during Squish's 30-day guarantee period.

✔ With Squish, you are adding a level of complication to your system — there's more opportunity for more to go wrong.

The bottom line: This is a terrific program — exceptionally well put-together and more than worth its low price.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.